

**100
YEARS
of**



BEXHILL MOTOR BUSES

by **David Padgham**

Cover photographs:

Top — Carter & Lidstone's Ford DY 1226, new in 1919, heavily loaded going down Chantry Lane, with the conductor balanced on the step.

Bottom — The last of Carter & Lidstone's Vulcan buses, 29-seater PM 5235 purchased in 1925, the year before selling the fleet to "Maidstone & District".

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First published 2001

ISBN 0 9537091 1 6

Desktop published using Pressworks, typeset in Garamond

Printed and bound by Rother Reprographics

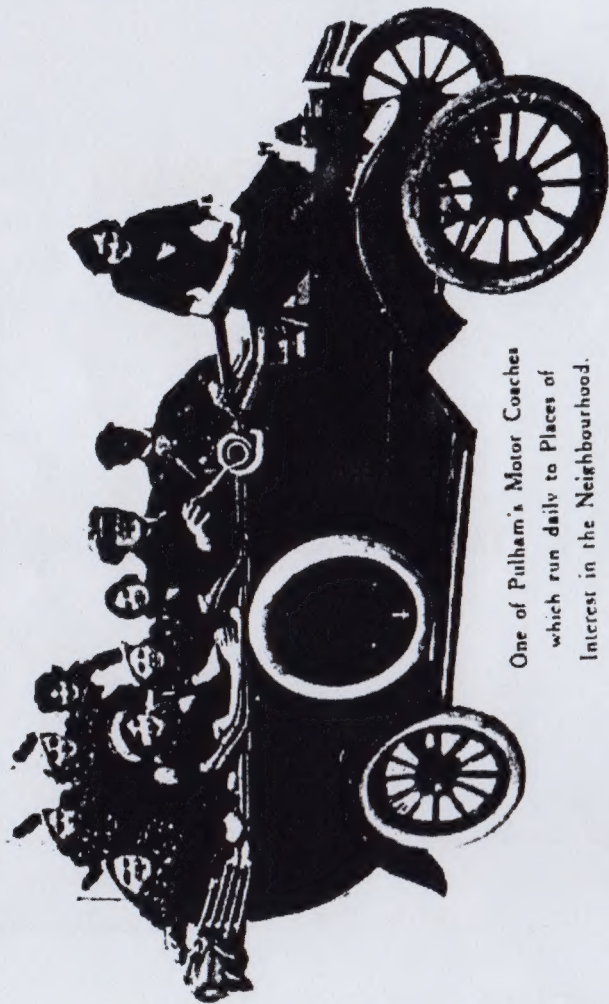
Published by Bexhill Museum Association, Bexhill Museum, Eger-
ton Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex TN39 3HL

**100 Years of Bexhill
Motor Buses
1901 to 2001**

by
David Padgham



THE POPULAR CORONETS ON A POPULAR CONVEYANCE.



One of Pulham's Motor Coaches
which run daily to Places of
Interest in the Neighbourhood.

One of Pulham's small Ford charabancs, from an advertisement of the 1920's.

FOREWORD

I have had an interest in buses from early childhood, commencing, so far as I can remember, from a visit to the Festival of Britain in 1951 with my father, who encouraged me to sit in a simulated bus driver's cabin. It was not long before I began to collect model buses, an interest which has continued throughout my life thus far.

From that initial experience in a driver's cabin there followed regular visits to numerous bus garages throughout the length and breadth of the country, culminating in several experiences as a real life bus driver.

My connection with Bexhill buses began when, as a small child, I visited my great-grandfather who had a bungalow in Ninfield Road near Sidley, and a mounting fascination with the former Maidstone & District buses almost developed into a love affair. Years later, whilst attending the Bexhill 100 weekend, I had the good fortune to meet Julian Porter, the Curator of the Bexhill Museum, who, upon learning of my fascination with buses, suggested that I might like to be involved with an exhibition on the history of Bexhill buses. This was too good an opportunity to miss, particularly when I discovered that Bexhill was one of the early pioneers of bus transport.

I hope the this exciting and stimulating history of the first 100 years of Bexhill's buses will rekindle many memories for its readers.

Paul London.

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1. The Pioneer Years: 1900-1918

A century ago travel facilities in Bexhill were almost non-existent. Village carriers passed through no more than once daily, the trams had not arrived, and the railway had no stations between Bexhill and Pevensey so that local journeys were impossible. The Bexhill West branch to Crowhurst did not exist, and labourers or market shoppers walked everywhere. The better off residents used horse cabs or their own carriages, and a very few up-to-date gentry headed by Earl De La Warr owned horseless carriages - so few that number plates to control them were not yet thought necessary.

The main carriers included John Barton of Hooe - landlord of the 'Red Lion' - who went through to Hastings on three days a week and Thomas Mitten of Little Common ran on Tuesdays and Fridays, his dog always trotting beneath the axles. Henry Allcorn came from Herstmonceux daily and a good account of a journey in his van is found in *Ninfield in the Nineties* by Alfred Ridel (Ninfield, 1979).

On Good Friday (13 April) 1900 a 'motor wagonette' owned and driven by Ben Burbidge of Hastings gave the first pleasure trips in the area from Hastings to Bulverhythe, extended shortly afterwards to the Bell Hotel at Bexhill Old Town. The fare was two shillings (10p) return but no passengers were allowed to start their journey in Bexhill. For a short time early in 1901 similar motor car rides were offered from Bexhill; details are obscure but this may have been a venture of Earl De La Warr, a keen pioneer motorist, employing his own cars and chauffeurs.

In 1901 a pioneer company was formed: Bexhill Motor Company. The Secretary and Manager - and founder - was Mr. Harold Bradney Williams, a business entrepreneur who came to live in the town. He purchased four petrol-engined 12 HP Daimlers: three single-deck buses each seating 12 inside and two extra passengers beside the driver, and one charabanc. The first bus was driven down from Coventry by his engineer, Edgar Harris, and his driver Thomas Burns, on the night of Friday 24 May 1901, the 150 mile journey taking 15 hours. They arrived on the Saturday morning 'very fatigued' according to the *Bexhill Observer*, with the bus covered in dust, but after cleaning a trial run was made on the Sunday. The next day, 26 May was Whit-Monday Bank Holiday and the bus began a service to Hastings which ran six or seven times and was full up all day.

This was the first motor bus service in Sussex, though not in Great Britain as one began in Edinburgh on 19 May 1898. Nearer home, three steam buses worked from Dover to Deal early in 1899, and London's first motor bus service started on 9 October 1899.

The first Bexhill bus was described as 'built on the waggonette type... The seats are upholstered and very comfortable. There is a fine covering made of oak which can be affixed in wet weather, and the views on the journey are not interrupted, the sides, back and front of the car being glass-panelled.' A photograph of one appeared in the *Bexhill Observer* issue of 8 December 1956; a board on the side showed the fare to Little Common was 3d single, 6d return - well beyond the pocket of a workman earning 4d per hour. The entrance was at the rear end, up two steep steps, and passengers sat sideways. The following week Mr. E. T. Coleman wrote that he remembered the bus, which sometimes broke down, and recognised the driver as Mr. Menzies and the conductor John Bishop. Other employees named in an early press report included drivers Charles Giles and George MacDonald, and conductors Percy Lancaster and David Bray.

A garage was acquired at 27 Sackville Road, on the east side between Marina and Parkhurst Road. The first service, to Hastings Memorial, taking 45 minutes each way, started there and went along Marina and up Sea Road to Old Town, 'mounting the hill without any appreciable strain'; thence via Nazareth House and Hastings Road - De La Warr Road did not yet exist. Later the service started from the Kursaal, near the present-day sailing club.

The second bus, which from the newspaper description appears to have been larger, arrived on 22 June and took over the Hastings service. The original one, and the third which arrived a few days later, were put on two local routes: to Little Common ten times a day, and to Sidley Green eight times. Some of the Sidley journeys went on to Ninfield, Boreham Street and Gardner Street (Hurstmonceux). Bexhill Council granted Hackney Carriage licences, but Hastings Corporation refused on the pretence that there was no more room on the licensed stands in the town centre. This was in reality due to antagonism between the two councils over the introduction of tramways. As a result the Bexhill Motor Co. could only pick up passengers in Hastings who had travelled out on the bus and held return tickets. This did not stop tourists in Hastings fighting to board, and in April 1902 Bradney Williams was convicted by Hastings magistrates of operating without a licence, and soon afterwards abandoned this service to concentrate on the others.

Problems of a different nature arose later in 1902 when new Government legislation required petrol to be stored in safer conditions. Bexhill Council served notice on Bradney Williams to find new premises with detached petrol store by August 1902, but he was unable to comply with regulations and in September the Council gave seven days notice to close down his site. This was the end of Bexhill Motor Company; the Sackville Road premises were vacated, and Mr. Williams vanished into obscurity. His buses were sold early in 1903 to Birmingham Motor Express Co. Ltd., a newly formed company which started a local service there, but they were withdrawn before the end of that year when licence plates were first introduced; their fate is not recorded.

A full account of the Bexhill operation is given in *The Pioneer Motorists of Hastings & Bexhill* by Clifford Mewett (to be published by the author, Bognor Regis). Little is known of Harold Bradney Williams, but he told reporters that over the past ten years he had been visiting his late father G. H. Williams who lived in Cranfield Road, and his mother Mrs. E. R. Williams who was now at 16 Wilton Road, so that he was no stranger to the town and was interested in the progress and development of Bexhill. He took a house at 9 Jameson Road, to which his mother soon moved; each of these three houses was successively named 'Prahnan' which provides virtually the only clue to the family background: this is an Indian word meaning 'Battle' or 'Victory', with the implication that Mr. Williams senior was an ex-Indian Army officer, and hence perhaps, following the norm, his son had received a public school education. When the 1901 census returns are released shortly we may learn further details!

The need for a local service having been proven, it was not long before a replacement bus was launched in the autumn of 1903; being less ambitious this was to survive far longer. James Friend & Son traded as grocers and fly proprietors at 3 Sackville Road, and had the 'Tally-Ho' horse-drawn charabanc at 16 Western Road and several other livery stables - though they advertised that Sunday orders were 'respectfully declined'. Friend put on a horse bus to Little Common from Bexhill Station - but only twice daily, leaving from the north side of the station at 9.30 am and 5.30 pm, returning from the 'Wheatsheaf' at 10.00 am and 6.00 pm. The route was outward via Station Road and Collington Lane, returning via Little Common Road. On Saturday evenings three extra journeys ran at 7.00, 8.00 and 9.00 pm, returning at 7.30, 8.30 and 9.30 pm. The fare was six pence each way, and parcels were carried for 2d, 3d or 4d according to size. 'Ticket holders have precedence', so advance booking was possible. There was a parcel office at 45 Sackville Road.

No pictures of this bus are known; it is just possible that Friend actually used his charabanc - the 'Tally-Ho' - in the intervals of plying for pleasure trips mid-morning and mid-afternoon during the season. It is difficult to comprehend what class of residents would find the bus service useful; it did not fit in with working men's hours and the fare was beyond their pocket.

Probably it appealed to the better-off business man who worked shorter hours, as a saving over the expense of hiring a cab which even then cost one shilling or more per mile.

The Saturday evening service was no doubt aimed at those visiting the 'Wheatsheaf' or other inns for an evening's entertainment, although shops often remained open until 10.00 pm on that day; however it had ceased by 1907. The firm expanded further into the new Metropole Mews behind 45 Western Road, before James Friend senior in 1909 handed over the greater part of the business including the bus to his son James who now traded as Friend & Co. An extra journey was put on at lunchtime by 1911, from town at 1.20 pm returning at 1.50 - which did not of course allow anyone time to go home to lunch and back. In 1914 a motor bus of unknown type replaced the horse bus. Late in World War I, in 1917 the Metropole Mews business was taken over by Frank Cable, of the Marina Model Dairy who briefly became a motor proprietor and owner of 'Cable's Bus', now reduced to two trips each way - 9.30 am and 5.30 pm daily; petrol was of course almost unobtainable and the venture ceased within a year.

A strange visitor seen in Bexhill during World War I, providing one of the very few pleasure trips available by motor during the crisis, was the gas-propelled charabanc belonging to Chapman & Sons of Eastbourne which carried an inflatable 'balloon' full of coal-gas on its roof.

Other forms of local transport had emerged in the meanwhile. On 1 June 1902 the South-Eastern & Chatham Railway opened their branch line from Bexhill West to Crowhurst, with connections for London, and a station at Sidley which provided quick local travel. This line closed as a war economy on 1 January 1917, reopening on 1 March 1919 but Sidley only reopened in June 1920 so the suburb was for a time without public transport. The London, Brighton & South Coast Railway opened a series of 'Halts' at Glyne Gap, Collington Wood, Cooden Beach, and Normans Bay on 11 September 1905 and started a service of rail motors from St. Leonards West Marina to Eastbourne at cheap fares. The station at Glyne Gap closed after only ten years, on 1 October 1915, its main users having been workers at the nearby Hastings gasworks.

The Hastings Tramways Company after several false starts opened their line between St. Leonards West Marina and Bexhill Metropole Hotel on 9 April 1906, providing the first 'workmen's tickets' along Bexhill Road, of which over 80 were immediately sold daily. A week later on Easter Monday over eleven thousand passengers made the ride, many no doubt visiting Bexhill for the first time in their lives. The line was extended at both ends on 28 July 1906 to run from Hastings town centre through Kewhurst to Cooden, and again a few days later on August Bank Holiday the number of sightseers multiplied tenfold, mostly from Bexhill to Cooden rather than to or from Hastings. The trams did not of course serve the communities of Sidley or Little Common and the main users were tourists as the tracks east and west of Bexhill were laid through cornfields - later these routes were developed to become De La Warr Road and Cooden Drive.

Back in the 'fifties a veteran driver of the Maidstone & District Motor Services, Dan Thomas of Little Common, recalled that in 1912 a motor bus service was put on between Bexhill and Ninfield by Buck's Garage, and he claimed to have a photograph of it. No supporting evidence has so far come to light, though in 1920 the original garage at 27 Sackville Road became A. Buck's Garage; possibly he had earlier worked from some other unidentified site.

In 1913 the Marina Garage was built on a vacant site between Eversley Road and Wilton Road, and another Bexhill Motor Company was formed under the ownership of E. Greenaway Grimes, who commenced a rival service by motor bus to Little Common and also one to Sidley. This was short-lived and possibly the vehicle was the same one put on by James Friend a year later.

Ownership of the Marina Garage passed in 1915 to Herbert Pulham who had started a motor car business as early as 1903 at De La Warr Mews on the north side of Station Road. In 1906 Pulham moved to 27 Sackville Road, the original garage vacated by Bradney Williams, and in January 1909 Pulham purchased a large second-hand charabanc from Canford Cliffs Motor Omnibus Co. of Westbourne, Bournemouth. This was a Leyland Y2 with Crossley 24/28hp engine, registered EL 547 in Bournemouth and described as yellow with green side panels. A leading expert on veteran Leylands, Mike Sutcliffe, advises that it was probably built in 1905 or early 1906, and may well have been delivered new to one of the London bus operators with a different body and London number-plate before going to Bournemouth. At that period of continual development, vehicles were modified frequently and often re-registered in whatever town they were operated.

A photograph of this by Emil Vieler, renowned local photographer, has recently been reproduced as a postcard by Bexhill Museum. It was taken at Battle Abbey on 3 January 1909; the very next day the registration was cancelled in the Bournemouth Heavy Motor Car Register, so probably it was re-licensed in East Sussex with an AP number; regrettably the relevant local registers have not survived. Ten of the fifteen passengers in this group were identified by readers of the *Bexhill Observer* after it was published there on 5 March 1960: Herbert Pulham is at extreme right, with on his left P. Abbott and then Pulham's partner Mr. Larrad. On the left is one of the Adams brothers from Sidley, and fourth from left is Alfred Coleman, who worked in Pulham's Garage.

In the centre wearing a bowler hat is blacksmith C. Catt, and other passengers included S. G. Reeve, manager of the *Bexhill Observer* and of F. J. Parsons' Bexhill printing works, 'Porky' Sharp, and Messrs. Warren and Whiteman. The probability is therefore that this was a demonstration run of a new acquisition; the 'air-cooled' appearance with the bonnet removed may have been to show off the wonders of the engine.

Pulham did not operate bus services, but continued for many years with excursions and outings, though in 1913 he did try out a demonstration model of a Daimler double-deck, which was too high to pass under Sackville Arch - a black spot which became notorious in later years when double-deckers became standard and probably 30 or more took the wrong turning with varying degrees of disaster.

During the petrol shortages of World War I, Herbert Pulham developed a little-known alternative fuel system which he fitted in September 1917 to two Ford 8-seater cars, similar to the one illustrated on the frontispiece of this booklet. This was compressed coal-gas, stored under pressure of 150 lbs. per square inch in three steel cylinders attached to the offside running board. When expanded at the engine valves the mixture of gas and air enabled the car to run for about 25 miles before recharging.

2. Expansion: 1919-1939

The end of World War I soon gave opportunities for the development of road passenger transport on a much greater scale than had been practicable earlier. Early in 1916 Reginald Adam Carter and George Reginald Lidstone in partnership had opened a motor garage off Church Hill, Little Common in Green Lane, and in September they purchased a Ford 20HP van, DY 996. In 1919 they formed a limited company Carter & Lidstone Ltd. and converted their van into a light-weight bus by fitting a 'BAICO' extension and a canvas-sided bus body entered by steps to a platform at the rear end. The 'BAICO' patent chassis extension, manufactured by the British and American Import Company, and marketed under their initials by a London firm, was widely used for enlarging Ford vehicles. This bus began a service from Sidley via Bexhill to Little Common and Cooden on or about 5 May 1919, the first regular postwar local service. The driver was returning ex-serviceman Mr. Ockenden. Jack Baker, who as a 16-year old was later a conductor on it, recalled that with a standing load at the back, the front wheels left the ground going up the hill to Old Town! It held 20 passengers, who sat sideways - just as they had in Williams' original bus of 1901. Four more small Ford buses were purchased new in the same year, and on 18 August a further service to Ninfield began. By the end of September the Ninfield route was extended to Catsfield, and other services ran from Bexhill to Hooe via Whydown and via Ninfield, and to Catsfield via Henley Down. Three more Fords were added between 1920 and 1922; the Ninfield and Catsfield route was extended to Battle in the late summer of 1920 and the trading name 'Bexhill & District Motor Services' was adopted. Their fleet expanded further in the next two years with three Vulcan buses, the last a larger one seating 29, and finally a small Morris 14-seater. This was an ambitious fleet for a small town operator and they gradually built up a network of services, which are still recalled with affection by the oldest residents.

The War Department had in 1913-14 subsidised large numbers of well designed Leyland and Daimler chassis built to their specification, which were almost immediately commandeered on the outbreak of war, while shortages of spare parts, fuel, and manpower stifled the emergent larger companies then staking out territorial claims for expansion. Among these was Maidstone & District Motor Services Ltd., formed in 1911, which had penetrated as far as Hastings in 1914. By 1919 conditions had improved sufficiently for them to inaugurate their first post-war new venture, and their first route entirely in

Sussex: service 'O', soon assigned number 15 when it was realised the alphabet was not long enough for planned expansion. It began on Saturday 28 June 1919 and is still operating today along virtually the same route, now as service 98 of the successor operator Stagecoach South Coast Buses: Hastings - Bexhill - Ninfield - Hailsham - Eastbourne. A year later it became jointly operated by sister company Southdown Motor Services Ltd. of Brighton. Buses used were mainly heavy, lumbering but dependable Leyland single-deckers.

Carter & Lidstone found themselves competing along Ninfield Road with the new Maidstone & District service, and on 25 May 1924 that company's first local route aimed particularly at the growing tourist trade was opened as service 34: Hastings - Bexhill - Ninfield - Battle - Hastings (circular in both directions). This competed all the way to Battle; three days later M&D's first local urban service: 35, Hastings - Bexhill - Sutherland Avenue - Little Common - Cooden Beach was an obvious attempt to secure their rival's passengers, but the light-weight Fords and the new Vulcans were able to get ahead and hold their own.

A further service for tourists during the summers of 1925-27 was the extension of Maidstone & District's no. 30, normally operating between Hastings and Rye via Brede, to start from Bexhill. The non-appearance of this in 1928 suggests it was not well supported. An express coach to London also began in 1925, after the successful operation of regular excursions to the Wembley Exhibition during the previous summer. Coaches also stood along Marina offering excursions during summer months, and in 1920 a Booking Office had been opened at 24a Sea Road to sell coach tickets; it was also possible to book seats on the Eastbourne bus, or in fact for any Maidstone & District bus journey, and parcels were accepted and carried cheaply.

Another small bus proprietor, Thomas ('Bumper') Sheather of Catsfield Stream, who ran the 'Battle Queen' charabanc and had taxis at Battle Station, in 1920 converted one of his Ford taxis into a bus by means of another 'BAICO' extension, with a body built by Cornelius of Belle Hill, working between Bexhill and Battle. Three firms were now competing for trade in the mid-twenties, but Sheather eventually abandoned his bus and concentrated on selling bicycles.

In the 1926 General Strike both Maidstone & District's and Carter & Lidstone's employees carried on working normally, and afterwards a public subscription



1. The first motor bus in Sussex: Harold Bradney Williams' "Bexhill Motor Company" Daimler on the Little Common service in the Summer of 1901, with Driver Menzies and Conductor John Bishop.



2. Chapman & Sons of Eastbourne operated this charabanc, HC 885 equipped with coal gas "balloon" during petrol shortages in World War I, on an excursion to Bexhill.



3. Herbert Pulham's first charabanc, Leyland EL 547, purchased second-hand in January 1909, seen on its first outing to Battle Abbey, with the proprietor at right and a full load of local business men.



4. Pulham's Motor Garage at Marina (left) in the 1930s, with one of his latest Ford motor coaches awaiting customers.

COODEN BEACH TRAM TERMINUS.



5. Carter & Lidstone's first bus, Ford DY 996, waiting at Cooden Beach; it has a canvas sided body built in 1919. The overhead wires for the tramway can be seen on the right.

A MOTOR BUS

Will leave LITTLE COMMON every hour, and proceed via Cooden, Western-road, St Leonards-road, to the L.B. and S.C. Railway Station.

Will then leave the STATION at 50 minutes after the hour and proceed to Sidley Green via Chantry-lane.

It will then leave SIDLEY GREEN at the half-hour, returning to the L.B. and S.C. Railway Station.

At 60 minutes to the hour the Car will leave for Little Common via Collington-avenue and Sutherland-avenue.

Fares:

Little Common to Cooden	2d.
Little Common to Bexhill	6d.
L.B. and S.C. Station to Springfield-road	3d.
Ditto to Sidley Green	3d.

First Car leaves Little Common at 8 a.m.

LITTLE COMMON, COODEN, BEXHILL AND SIDLEY MOTOR BUS SERVICE.

TIME TABLE.

Leave Little Common	Arrive Railway Station	Leave L.B. & S.C. Station for Sidley	Leave Sidley for L.B. & S.C. Station	Leave Sidley for Little Common
8.0	8.15	8.30	8.30	8.40
9.0	9.15	9.30	9.30	9.40
10.0	10.15	10.30	10.30	10.40
11.0	11.15	11.30	11.30	11.40
12.0	12.15	12.30	12.30	12.40
1.0	1.15	1.30	1.30	1.40
2.0	2.15	2.30	2.30	2.40
3.0	3.15	3.30	3.30	3.40
4.0	4.15	4.30	4.30	4.40
5.0	5.15	5.30	5.30	5.40
6.0	6.15	6.30	6.30	6.40
7.0	7.15	7.30	7.30	7.40
8.0	8.15	8.30	8.30	8.40
9.0	9.15	9.30	9.30	9.40

Fares:

Little Common to Cooden	2d.
Little Common to Bexhill	6d.
L.B. and S.C. Station to Springfield-road	3d.
Ditto to Sidley Green	3d.
Sidley Green to Old Town	3d.

6. Two timetable advertisements in the Bexhill Observer for Carter & Lidstone's first services in 1919.



7. One of Carter & Lidstone's Ford buses waiting outside Bexhill Central Station in the early 1920s.



8. Carter & Lidstone's DY 1463, a Ford T with BAICO patent extension and canvas side screens as originally built; at Cooden Beach with Driver Vic. Burt of Catsfield and Conductor Bert Earl. A Hastings tram is in the background, along the undeveloped Cooden Drive.



9. Carter & Lidstone's DY 1463 showing its body rebuilt with glazed windows, waiting in Buckhurst Road between journeys.



10. Rear view of Carter & Lidstone's Ford DY 1463 (no. 6 in the fleet) with Conductor Masters posing alongside, between Ninfield and Catsfield. Note the entry via a rear platform, and the sideways bench seats inside.



11. Carter & Lidstone's first Vulcan bus, PM 3877, new in 1923, waiting at Ninfield with Driver Roy Muggridge and Conductor Harry Holdstock.



12. Thomas Sheather's Ford bus, converted in 1920 from a taxi to work the service between Bexhill and Battle. The driver is F. R. Muggridge.



13. Highwood Golf Club's Dennis 18-seater bus, purchased in February 1928 to ferry golfers from the Sackville Hotel and local stations. Eighteen months later it was sold to "Maidstone & District".

THE
Bexhill Char-a-Banc Co.
 (Proprietor—R. J. E. SINCOCK),
23, SACKVILLE ROAD.

ON AND AFTER MAY, 1st,
 A
MOTOR TOURING CAR
 To Seat 24 Persons

Can be engaged for
 DAY TRIPS, WEEK-ENDS, OR
 LONGER PERIODS, TO PLACES
 OF INTEREST, RACE MEETINGS,
 BREAKFAST PARTIES, CLUB
 AND SCHOOL OUTINGS, ETC.

Full Particulars on application
 to the above.

14. "The Bexhill Char-a-Banc Co.", proprietor R. J. E. Sincock, advertising in the *Bexhill Observer* in 1919-20.



15. Maidstone & District's Leyland KN 2398, new in 1919, at Hurstmonceux on service 15, the company's first route to pass through Bexhill. In 1927 the crew, Driver Jack Parry and Conductor Knell, were told to find lodgings in the village, parking the bus overnight in Duly's Garage to save the time and expense of running empty from Hastings each morning.



16. M. & D. Leyland KL 5012 of 1925, with a detachable-top body built by Harringtons of Hove, at Cooden Beach on service 35 from Hastings in the mid 1920s.



17. M. & D. Leyland "Lion" KO 7325, new in 1928, with body built by Short Bros. of Rochester; seen in Ninfield Road in the early 'thirties.



18. M. & D. Leyland "Titan" 48-seater open top double decker KO 7347, delivered in 1928, waiting near the Booking Office at Bexhill Marina on its way to Hastings.



19. FKO 228, one of the last purpose-built open top double deck buses in the country, built by Weymann on a Leyland chassis in 1939. Marina was the main bus terminus for Bexhill and being also the tourist centre many photographs were taken here.



20. An unintended open top bus was created early in 1947 when KJ 1918, a Leyland of 1931, was driven under Sackville Arch. Uniquely it operated for two seasons with full glazing but no roof.



21. Southdown Motor Services jointly worked route 15 from Eastbourne, and their Leyland CCD 939 (on right) is passing M. & D. CKE 440, another Leyland, in the late 1930s.



22. The London express coach service takes a roadside break; this 1930 Leyland had two doors, both opening outwards on hinges, but the forward one was mainly for emergency use.



23. The Booking Office at Marina opened in 1927. Here the inspector and two drivers, all in summer dustcoats, pose alongside chalked boards advertising coach trips including Bodiam Castle for 4 shillings (20p.).



24. The Booking Office in wartime shows a very different appearance, with windows and doors protected from front-line broken glass, and posters advertising queuing regulations alongside an appeal to travel off-peak between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm.



25. The Bus Depot in Terminus Road opposite Bexhill West Station, opened in 1927 to hold 18 buses. This wartime view shows a soldier manning a machine gun post on the office roof.



26. The Bus Depot was extended eastward in 1950 and here in the annexe Fitter G. H. Simmins (right) repairs a prewar Leyland bus.



27. Postwar deliveries of new buses showed a breakaway from the traditional Leylands. This Bristol, JKM 919, was new in 1948 and ran for twelve years. Most of this full load of holiday makers going towards Hooe were probably staying in the caravan camp at Whydown.



28. Motor buses replacing the trolleybuses in 1959 were of revolutionary design, having the engine mounted transversely at the rear enabling the entrance to be alongside the driver. Seen here in Station Road, 45 DKT was one of a batch of these Leyland 'Atlantean' double-deckers of special low design which could safely pass under Sackville Arch.



29. DKE 264C, a Leyland "Panther" with shiny new paint, just delivered in 1965, picks up passengers at the bus shelter by the New Inn at Sidley Green.



30. Bexhill Community Bus launched their first minibus on 15 September 1980. This was a Ford Transit with purpose-built body by Reeves Burgess; here it is decorated with flags in Ridgewood Gardens to mark the opening day.



31. Bexhill Bus Company, set up under the 1980 Act, ran numerous local services. This Bristol is speeding along Sutherland Avenue towards Bexhill and then Watermill Lane in Sidley.



32. Renown Coaches, closely associated with Bexhill Bus Co., loaned them this Bedford coach seen in their depot at Sidley goods Yard on 20 February 1982.



33. Topline Buses competed with other firms from 1987 to 1990, using large buses such as this Leyland "National", seen at Devonshire Square.



34. Coastal Coaches of Newick successfully tendered for several local services from June 1996. Their Iveco (Ford/Fiat partnership) bus XS 2210 is turning from De La Warr Road into College Road, on a former Bexhill Bus Co. service.



35. "Autopoint", from Bodle Street Green, took over other routes from the same date as "Coastal". This Mercedes, 7634 AP, is waiting at Bexhill Cemetery.



36. Stagecoach is now the principal long-distance operator in the area, and their frequent trunk routes along the coast between Dover and Brighton are operated with modern double-deckers such as this Volvo seen at Little Common by the "Wheatsheaf" – a far cry from the pioneer Daimler which went there a century ago.

fund was raised to reward the men. A few weeks later Carter & Lidstone Ltd. reached an agreement with Maidstone & District to sell their enterprise, and the buses, staff and services, with the office and depot in Green Lane, were transferred on 21 July. The depot, which by this time was described as 'modern, steel-framed brick built' was used by M&D for almost a year until a new one was opened in Terminus Road; it was offered at auction on 23 February 1928. The former proprietors retained their garage at 27a Western Road for a short time, forming a new company, Carter & Lidstone (1927) Ltd. offering chauffeur-driven car hire, but in 1930 they removed to Ringwood in Hampshire and actually operated buses there for a while.

The Hooe service became number 48, Watermill Lane was abandoned, the Battle route was assimilated into the 34. Local services to Sidley and Cooden appear to have continued temporarily by the old timetable until a major reorganisation on 4 June the following year on the opening day of M&D's new depot and booking office - which remained in use until 1980. The old booking office in Sea Road was moved at the same time to Wilton Court Mansions at Marina, where it survived until 1985 with the successor company 'Hastings & District'. The takeover brought new services 50 (from Cantelupe Road Golf Club House via Glenleigh Park to Bexhill Cemetery) and 51 (from Nazareth House via Amherst Road and Chantry Lane to Sidley). The 50 was short-lived, being merged with the 48 on 1 October 1928; from the same date the 51 was extended from Nazareth House along Hastings Road to Glyne Gap and Hastings town centre, to pass near First Avenue where Pebsham Estate was emerging; most roads here remained unadopted until after World War II.

Many permutations of routes to and from Sidley were tried, e.g. via Barrack Road or Springfield Road (London Road was only completed at the Sidley end in 1930, and King Offa Way which now intervenes did not, of course, then exist). Alternate Glenleigh Park journeys operated via Down Road or West Down Road, while in August 1927 for a few months alternate journeys on service 48 actually ran via Knebworth Road and Ellerslie Lane to the Cemetery.

Subsequent variations of local routes are too frequent to be recorded in detail here. Some of these minor routes were worked by small Dennis buses without conductors.

In February 1928 Highwood Golf Club put on the road their own bus, PN 844 - a Dennis 30 cwt. 18-seater. This ferried golfers from the Sackville Hotel and both stations in the days when few residents had their own cars, until on 23 September 1929 this too was sold to Maidstone & District who augmented the Hooe service to provide a similar facility.

Also in 1928 the Hastings Tramways Company, still running trams along Cooden Drive and De La Warr Road, replaced the ancient tramcars on 18 September with single-deck 'trackless trolleybuses', operating on overhead wires. In Hastings there were also double-deck trolley-buses, open topped, of which one is still preserved, but these did not regularly work the Cooden route. Both types were gradually superseded from 1940 onwards by more modern covered double-deckers. An extra route via Wickham Avenue opened on 1 July 1931, and on 11 November 1935 the system was purchased by Maidstone & District who continued operating trolleybuses until 31 May 1959.

A new extension of bus route 35 began on 1 December 1928 along Barnhorne Road as far as Constables Farm (just beyond the later prison site). There was no suitable road west of this point until the opening of the new A259 marsh road early in 1934; the old narrow lane still winds in and out across the marsh, just wide enough for one car.

From the same date other buses on the 35 service, going to Cooden Beach, worked a circular route via Cooden Drive returning via Little Common (and vice-versa), competing for the first time with the new trolleybuses along Cooden Drive - which had only recently been upgraded from a tram track to a modern road surface.

This competitive section ceased on 1 April 1936, shortly after the trolleybus system was bought out by the motorbus company, but was reinstated a year later, renumbered 104, no doubt due to the demand by residents of the developing Barnhorne area for train connections at Cooden Station.

Small coach operators setting up in the 1920s included the Bexhill Charabanc Co. (proprietor R. J. E. Sincok) of 23 Sackville Road, and Messrs. Peskett & Hedges' Bexhill Touring Cars with a 1922 charabanc registered PM 153. Also passing through from the Summer of 1929 were the coaches of East Kent Road Car Co. Ltd. on the new South Coast Express from Margate to Weymouth.

3. The Road Traffic Act, 1930

Until now licensing of buses and services had been in the hands of local authorities, so that licences were needed for each town passed through; the strictness of control varied from place to place, with Hastings having a reputation for severity. In rural districts little control seems to have been exercised. All this changed with the passing of the 1930 Road Traffic Act, which set up regional Traffic Commissioners to licence services, timetables, fares, and staff, and to have buses examined regularly for fitness. Road service licences were issued to existing operators who could prove reliability and a need for the service, and where demand for a new route could be demonstrated, preference was given to the existing operator over a newcomer. This made it almost impossible for anyone to set up in competition with a service already operating, and Maidstone & District, being the only existing operator in Bexhill, retained their monopoly for exactly fifty years; all references here to bus services during that time are to those provided by this operator. Private coach hire was exempt, and small firms did provide this facility and occasionally were able to obtain a licence for excursions at individual fares.

Local authorities were also given powers over the positioning and design of bus stops, in addition to the few erected by the bus operators. Bexhill Corporation adopted an exceptionally heavy enamelled cast iron design not unlike the familiar London Transport logo, of which one formerly at Glenleigh Park survives in the author's collection. They would have been lethal should one ever have fallen on a passenger's head!

The new road over Pevensey Marsh enabled service 99 to provide a quick route to Eastbourne from 29 March 1934; the only way by bus previously was via Hailsham, taking 1 hour 25 minutes. With a reliable network now complete, no other significant developments occurred in Bexhill during the 'thirties although at the Hastings end of services 35 and 51, the purchase by Maidstone & District of the local operator A. Timpson & Son Ltd. in 1934 enabled their extension to Ore from 1 April 1936 following the integration of the two networks.

4. Wartime and after: 1940 to 1959

World War II saw an immediate drop in the demand for local bus travel, combined with the requirement for economy, the partial evacuation of civilians and the lack of manpower due to conscription. Regulations made under the Defence of the Realm Act allowed additional standing passengers, and if six or more intending passengers were waiting at a bus stop they were legally required to form a queue - the latter was repealed in the 1950s, contrary to popular belief that it is still the law. A curfew prevented buses from operating along Bexhill Marina after dark; most evening journeys were soon suspended and daytime frequencies were reduced, with no buses on Sunday mornings. Headlights were masked and lighting became minimal inside, to avoid attracting the attention of enemy aircraft; the roofs of buses were painted dark green for the same reason.

Buses were again commandeered by the Government, and new ones were almost unobtainable; late in the war a few 'utility' versions were released, often in grey primer and with wooden slatted seats. Windows of the office at Marina were boarded up to avoid flying glass. A machine gun post was set up on the roof of the depot in Terminus Road.

Tourist routes were the first to be cut; in the summer of 1939 six new open-top double-deckers had been delivered - the last to be specially constructed for regular service in this country - for use on the popular Battle and Hastings circular 34. However within months they were drafted away to safer areas and on 2 October 1940 the circular route was reduced to working between Bexhill and Battle only, never to resume, though the open-top buses did reappear in the town on other routes in postwar years as late as the mid-1960s.

From the same date the direct Eastbourne 99 and the local 104 were taken off; services 35 and 51 ceased to operate the section between Bexhill and Hastings, leaving just the trolleybuses and the hourly no. 15 to Hastings. The 51 for a short while went as far as Nazareth House, but even this ceased from 9 July 1942 and it then ran only to Sidley and the Cemetery. There was a partial restoration of lost services from 3 October 1945, shortly following the end of the war, and from here onward only major developments will be noted. Additional local journeys were provided by new service 121 from 22 September 1948. An innovation during the summer of 1951 was the use of an open single-deck bus on a seafront service from Brookfield Road along West Parade

to Southcourt Avenue. Although short fares were available at 1½ old pence, and the round trip for 8d, the service was not well patronised and ceased in September.

The early 1950s in most areas saw the busiest passenger loadings ever known in the tourist season; at that time only the well-to-do owned cars and the ordinary family rejoiced in the new freedom to go sight-seeing at every opportunity. An economy unpopular at the time both with passengers and crew was the gradual introduction of larger 'pay-as-you-enter' single-deck buses, the 34 being among the first in the area from early in 1958.

5. Reorganisation and Nationalisation: 1959-1980

The closure of the Hastings Tramways trolleybus system on 1 June 1959 was the occasion of a major reorganisation of bus services in Bexhill, combined with the introduction of the latest model of double-decker: the Leyland 'Atlantean' seating over 70 passengers in great comfort. A special low height version was able to pass safely under the railway line at Sackville Arch, scene of numerous accidents involving bridge strikes by normal double-deckers, as foretold by Mr. Pulham's trial run in 1913. One such victim had been KJ 1918, a Leyland dating from 1931 which lost its roof under the arch early in 1947 and was a unique sight for the next two summers while it ran as an open-top bus but with all its top deck windows intact.

The new Atlanteans worked four services from Hastings to different areas of Bexhill: 154 via De La Warr Road and Cooden Drive, 156 via Nazareth House and Holliers Hill to Sidley and Ellerslie Lane - the old designation on the front of buses reading 'Bexhill Cemetery' had been removed by public request. The 157 via Nazareth House terminated at the De La Warr Pavilion, and the 159 using De La Warr Road continued via Sutherland Avenue and Cooden Sea Road.

Until now Maidstone & District had been part of the British Electric Traction group, but the Transport Act 1968 brought nationalisation. From 6 March the company was temporarily attached to the Tilling Holding Company, which comprised another group already state-owned through voluntary sale. From 1 January 1969 control passed to the National Bus Company. Policy decisions brought a new standard model of single-deck bus - the Leyland 'National' - and routes were renumbered on an area basis in 1974. In 1979 a 'market analysis project' was set up using a pioneer computer programme, in an attempt to work out optimum routes and timings to suit a majority of passengers at the lowest operating cost.

Numerous changes resulted, few of which proved satisfactory. Another result was the closure on 27 April 1980 of the depot at Terminus Road, which was demolished in 1984 and is now the site of 'Belmont' sheltered housing. Services in Bexhill were drastically reduced as being uneconomic. On 14 December 1980 a subsidiary operation was set up under the name 'Hastings & District'. This became a separate company within the National Bus Group from 22 May 1983, when Maidstone & District withdrew from the area.

In Bexhill the Friends of the Elderly launched the Bexhill Community Bus with financial support from the County Council, using a minibus with volunteer drivers. This began on 15 September 1980 and ran to Cowdray Park, Pebsham Lane, Glovers Lane and Ridgewood Gardens. Other routes followed, and continue to the present day.

6. Deregulation and Denationalisation: 1980 to date

The Transport Act 1980, coming into force on 6 October, gave the first opening since 1930 for new commercial operators to challenge the right of the 'established operator' to provide new services when a requirement arose. A group of drivers formerly employed at the Maidstone & District's Bexhill depot lost no time in applying for licences as **Manxtree Ltd.**, under the trading name of **Bexhill Town Bus Services**, which were granted with effect from 8 December. Based at the former railway Goods Yard in Sidley, they provided services, partly competing with their former employers, from Marina to Cooden Beach, Little Common, Mount Idol View in Sidley, and Ridgewood Gardens via Bexhill Hospital. Other routes followed, but despite a grant from the Borough Council they soon ran into financial problems over replacing old buses, and late in November of the following year the proprietor of Renown Coaches (founded in 1961), Michael Harmer, purchased a 75% share in the business which now traded as **Bexhill Bus Company**. Two other small firms operating private hire coaches in the town were **Leeway Travel** (Messrs. Lee & Challen of London Road) who advertised early in 1983, and **Jeff Morton** who owned one coach.

Rambler Coaches of Hastings had in fact provided a minimal public bus service a few months prior to the 1980 Act, under a clause in the 1968 Act enabling school buses to carry adults where no other service existed. Their coach carrying children from Hooe to Bexhill was licensed from 27 April 1980 to carry all-comers, and later worked an additional journey in off-peak time until the latter was taken over, by agreement, by Maidstone & District from 2 February 1982.

The Transport Act 1985 removed the requirement for local bus services to be licenced with effect from 26 October 1986, and provided for the denationalisation of state-owned companies. 'Hastings & District' was sold on 16 December 1987 to its manager Richard Bailey and two colleagues. Two years later on 8 December 1989 this operation was purchased by Stagecoach, an emerging empire originating in Scotland, which still provides a large proportion of local bus services under the name **South Coast Buses**.

The way was now open for anyone to set up a bus operation provided that due notice was given to the authorities. Bexhill Bus Company started an additional service to Hastings, and under a new subsidy arrangement with East Sussex County Council from 27 July 1987 they provided 'County Rider' buses for

uneconomic rural routes to Battle and Staplecross, also to Hooe. Others added later included a short-lived one to Normans Bay, the only time this hamlet has ever been served by bus. Operations were gradually scaled down for economic reasons, and from 27 November 1995 Mr. Harmer suddenly surrendered all his Bexhill Bus Company operations, apart from a few journeys operated for the County Council using their specially adapted buses with wheelchair facilities, which were transferred to Harmer's other business Renown Coaches. Stagecoach were asked to provide services on a temporary basis while new subsidies were negotiated.

Also emerging under the 1985 Act, on 25 May 1987, was 'Topline', a joint venture by Southdown Motor Services and Eastbourne Buses — the latter controlled at arm's length by Eastbourne Borough Council. With a fleet of mainly old 'Atlantean' double-deckers and 'National' single-deckers, later repainted in a distinctive black and yellow livery, Topline ran services from Eastbourne to Hastings and St. Helens Hospital, both via Hailsham and via Pevensey in competition with 'Hastings & District'. On 24 August 1988 a limited company was formed: **Hastings Top Line Buses Ltd.**, but a year later Stagecoach purchased the shares of both partners. Southdown itself had been denationalised on 2 October 1987 and was subsequently acquired by the Stagecoach group, who on purchasing 'Hastings & District' within weeks withdrew Topline from competitive operation as annual losses had been in six figures, and the two undertakings were merged by stages early in 1990.

Eastbourne Buses continued to operate through Bexhill, however, on their service from Eastbourne which continued to Battle - and at one time via Bodiam and Rye as far as New Romney. This was reduced to two school journeys from 28 May 2000. A short-lived appearance of the **Lewes Coaches** subsidiary of **Brighton Buses**, controlled by Brighton Borough Council, in the summer of 1989 was part of service X99 between Brighton and Hastings, jointly worked with Eastbourne Buses.

Empress Coaches of Hastings from 11 March 1995 operate some journeys to the Conquest Hospital. From 27 June 1996 tenders were accepted for the ex-Harmer services from **Coastal Coaches**, formerly of Seaford and now based in Newick, and from **Autopoint** of Bodle Street Green, with Renown still providing only limited services. From 27 September 1998 the Coastal Coaches work was transferred to Autopoint, making them the principal town operator.

For completeness mention should be made of **J & H Coaches** of Rye who

provide school buses for Bexhill College from Beckley and Robertsbridge, and Inland Travel of Flimwell who run in from Camber with students. A surprising total of 30 bus and coach operators has thus been identified as having served Bexhill in the first hundred years, despite the total monopoly existing between 1930 and 1980.

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OMNIBUS SERVICE

BETWEEN

LITTLE COMMON & L.B. & S.C. RY. STATION, BEXHILL.

JAMES FRIEND & SON

RUN A 'BUS FROM BEXHILL EVERY DAY (Sundays excepted), Starting outside of the North side of Bexhill Station at 9.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m., and from the WHEATSHEAF HOTEL, Little Common, 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. And on SATURDAY EVENINGS from Town Hall at 7 p.m., 8 p.m., and 9 p.m., and from Wheatsheaf Hotel at 7.30 p.m., 8.30 p.m., and 9.30 p.m. Fare **6d.** each way. Parcels taken at 2d., 3d., and 4d. each. The Little Common route is through Station Road, Collington Lane, and returning by Main Road. Ticket holders to have preference. Inward Parcels can be left at FRIEND's Chief Office, back of 45, Sackville Road; and arrangements will be made at Little Common for receiving same to be called for.

Carriage Orders punctually attended to, if Orders are given to Driver of 'Bus, or sent by Post.

From the Bexhill Directory & Almanack of 1904.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bob Cook and Nicholas King for helpful comments and information, and to the News Sheets of the Maidstone & District and East Kent Bus Club for details of operations in recent years.

Photographic credits:

13. John Hodges.

19 & 27. R. Hannay.

28 & 29. Robert Crouch.

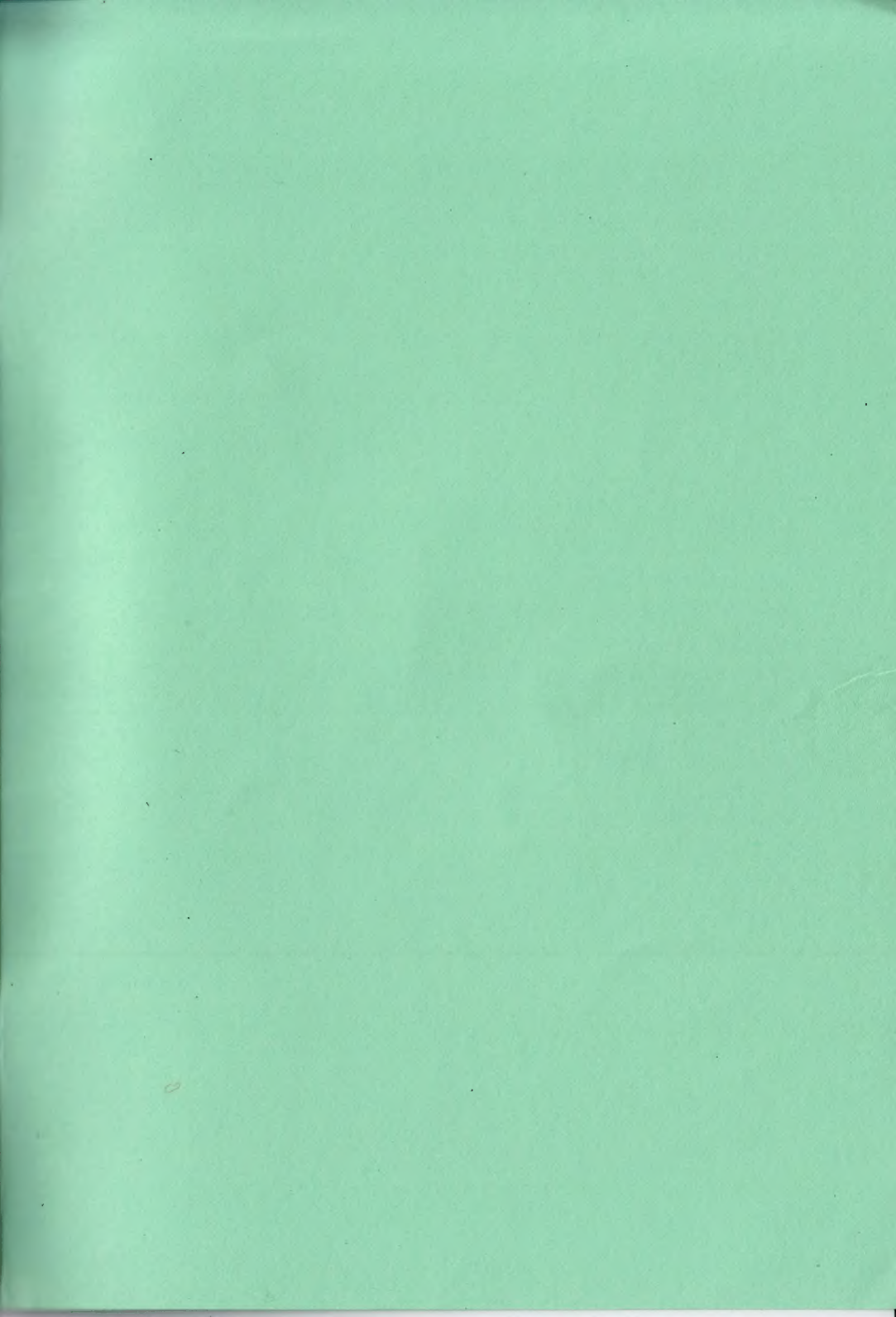
32, 34 & 35. Bob Cook.

26. M & D and East Kent Bus Club.

Cover top, 3 & 7. Bexhill Museum.

30, 33 & 36. John Grubb.

Remainder are from the author's collection.



The Author

David Padgham first took an interest in different types of bus whilst at school in Hastings during World War II, and in 1949 began to photograph the vintage vehicles then still surviving, also to collect the rapidly disappearing "Bell Punch" tickets. Subsequently, work in the offices of Maidstone & District for over 30 years gave access to obsolete records, many of which, including early timetables were rescued from threatened destruction. Contact with older employees, some of whom had been working since the pioneer days and were eager to reminisce and to loan cherished photographs for copying, enabled a large archive to be built up. This has always been at the disposal of fellow researchers. A particular interest is in the changing pattern of routes over the years to meet new social requirements.

As a non-motorist he still travels extensively by bus and on foot in Sussex and Kent, and believes the present-day network is still reliable and, apart from some isolated villages, adequate to meet contemporary demands, despite the fashionable denigration of it by those who never use buses under any circumstances.

Other current occupations in his 'retirement' are wide-ranging and facilitated by the absence of television in the household. He is the Chairman and Editor of Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group; Past President of and editorial contributor to the international India Study Circle for Philately; Secretary of Hastings & East Sussex Philatelic Society (for over 35 years!) and Editor of Judges Postcards Study Group.



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